



Escalante Route: Tanner Trail to New Hance Trail

Among the commonly hiked sections below the South Rim, the Escalante Route has a reputation for requiring a bit extra from Grand Canyon hikers. Several passages encountered along the way require exposed hand and toe climbing. A feel for the route ahead will save time at the difficult spots. The Colorado River is usually the only reliable source of water, so fool-proof methods of turbid water purification are a real necessity. On the other hand, you are presented with a delightful variety of canyon environments, ranging from the wide open spaces of Furnace Flats, to the slot-like confines of lower Seventyfive Mile Creek. Hance Rapids at the mouth of Red Canyon represents the premier stretch of whitewater in the upper reaches of the Grand Canyon. Changing geology, as the sedimentary Supergroup gives way to the ancient Vishnu Complex, combine with remarkable views from a variety of elevations to produce a Grand Canyon experience of the first order.

Locations/Elevations

Tanner Beach, BB9 (2700 ft / 823 m) to Cardenas Creek, BC9 (2650 ft / 807 m):	3 mi (4.8 km)
Cardenas Creek, BC9 (2650 ft / 807 m) to Seventyfive Mile Creek, BC9 (2580 ft / 786 m):	7 mi (11.2 km)
Seventyfive Mile Creek, BC9 (2580 ft / 786 m) to Hance Rapids, BD9 (2550 ft / 777 m):	2 mi (3.2 km)

Mileages

Maps

7.5 Minute Desert View, Cape Royal, and Grand View Point Quads (USGS)
Sky Terrain Trails Map, Grand Canyon (Sky Terrain)
Trails Illustrated Map, Grand Canyon National Park (National Geographic)

Water Sources

The Colorado River represents the only reliable water. Hikers can access the shoreline many places between Tanner Beach and Cardenas Creek, at the mouths of Escalante Creek and Seventyfive Mile Creek, at several spots between Seventyfive Mile and Papago Creeks, and near Hance Rapids. The Colorado River is often silt-laden and difficult to purify.

Campsites

Most hikers utilize beaches along the Colorado River for camping. Good beach camps are located at the mouths of Tanner Canyon (BB9), Cardenas Creek (BC9), Escalante Creek (BC9), Seventyfive Mile Creek (BC9), Papago Creek (BC9), and Red Canyon (BD9). Encounters with river trips are possible at Cardenas and Red Canyon; please yield large camps to large river trips. A dry camp is located west of Cardenas Creek near the head of the unnamed drainage.

Trailhead Access

Access is via the Tanner Trail on the east. The New Hance Trail and the Tonto Trail provide access on the west. Please see these route descriptions for more information on these trails.

Trail Description

The route can be hiked in either direction, but traveling with the flow of the land is appealing so this passage will be described from the perspective of a downcanyon hiker. Follow the Tanner Trail to the shoreline. Rocks placed at the trail margins make it easy to see the way across Tanner Beach and up onto the bench above the river that forms the route downstream towards Cardenas Canyon. A well-trodden trail works its way along the foot of the Supergroup slopes above the shoreline. Shallow gullies must be crossed at intervals; but generally speaking, the route from Tanner to Cardenas is straightforward.

Cardenas Creek is almost always dry, but there is easy access to the Colorado River via the bed of the drainage. This is the last reliable water source until one reaches the river at the mouth of Escalante Creek. The trail crosses Cardenas Creek about two hundred yards above the shoreline and climbs the Dox Hill immediately west. There are a couple of ways to do this, but these route options ultimately converge into a single trail immediately south of the Dox Hill. The correct path, however, follows the rising slope of red

sandstone toward and up the unnamed side canyon between Cardenas and Escalante Creeks and reaches the bed of the drainage above the cliff bands that block access to the Colorado River.

The route crosses the unnamed drainage and traverses west toward the crest of the ridge north of Escalante Creek. Caution is indicated throughout this area, as there are many places where you will want to avoid a misstep at all cost. Some sections offer a walking surface about a boot-sole wide while traversing slopes that fall steeply away for hundreds of feet. Take your time and walk with care. The exposure may appear dramatic but truly is comfortable hiking. The trail seems to traverse west forever, finally going to the top of the ridge just short of the west end. A fine view in all directions is the reward for all the side hill walking. (This is also the location of the steep bypass through "Butchart's Notch".)

The trail crosses the ridge and descends rapidly to the bed of Escalante Creek. A barrier fall in the main arm prevents direct access to the river, so the route crosses to the south side of the wash and around into the short arm of Escalante. Well developed route-finding skills will help here. The canyon bottom forms the route for a short distance but soon the trail traverses west to pass a high pouroff, crosses a bit of talus and descends to the creek bed below the fall. Both arms of Escalante Creek are normally dry, but once established below the fall it's an easy walk to the shoreline.

The trail climbs away from the river below the mouth of Escalante Creek and follows a rising ramp of Shinumo Quartzite downcanyon. Walk the top of this formation around into Seventyfive Mile Creek. Though there is a route directly down the cliffs to the creek bottom, a less thrilling (and probably safer) option is to walk the top of the Shinumo all the way to the bed of Seventyfive Mile Creek and continue down the drainage bottom to the river. A couple of minor obstacles present themselves but the solutions are obvious. The Shinumo Quartzite section of Seventyfive Mile Creek is a real treat - deep and narrow. Watch for some neat slickensides near the river, the results of ancient faulting. Nevills Rapids provides a backdrop for several nice camping spots. The area is equally popular among river runners so you may encounter other groups. Seventyfive Mile Creek is normally dry in its lower reaches, but there is access to the river at various points throughout the stretch from Escalante to Papago Creeks. Note: Seventyfive Mile Creek, in particular, is prone to flash floods. These flood events regularly change the structure of the drainage and, in kind, the route. Hikers should be wary of drainage travel during rain events.

Trails along the beach form the route downriver towards Papago Creek. Eventually sand gives way to rock and a series of ledges require a bit of attention to avoid being rimmed up. In general, stay as close to the river as is conveniently possible. The trail goes up and over a small outcrop of sandstone before dropping back to river level at the mouth of Papago Creek. A high route is also possible and may be cairned.

A cliff emerges from deep water below the mouth of Papago Creek. A significant detour is necessary to bypass a relatively short river stretch. Exit Papago on the west and work up a series of tall ledges. A short rope to better facilitate pack handling will prove a worthwhile accessory, especially for a solo walker. Start up immediately west of the mouth of the drainage. The holds are big and secure, but as one gains height the perception of exposure is hard to avoid. The route leads up from ledge to ledge, so it's never more than a move or two between resting places if you have chosen the line of least resistance. The climbing is easy, but no mistakes are allowed. About 35 feet up the angle relents and one can scramble up the talus toward minor cliff bands above. There are several ways to surmount these little crags, all with obvious trails giving access. Climb the slopes to a (more or less) horizontal trail about 300 vertical feet above the river.

The trail traverses less than 100 yards downcanyon before coming to the top of a talus filled runnel that allows passage back to the shoreline. This gully seems dangerous - steep, with lots of big boulders in precarious balance. Large groups are more at risk because more people moving around means increased chances of dislodged rocks. Large groups should hike VERY close together, or VERY far apart. The immediate shoreline forms the most efficient route between bottom of this treacherous little gully and the mouth of Red Canyon. The walk downstream through riparian vegetation is a real pleasure. The river flows quietly through the large pool above Hance Rapids, and beaver or waterfowl are occasionally encountered. A downcanyon walker arriving at Hance Rapids could continue west via the Tonto Trail toward Mineral Canyon, the Grandview Trail and points beyond, or ascend to the rim via the bed of Red Canyon on the New Hance Trail.

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